

T H E

C A R S E O F S T I R L I N G,

A N

E L E G Y.

Auditis ? An me ludit amabilis
Infania ? Audire, et videor pios
Errare per lucos, amoenae
Quos et aquae fubeunt, et aurae.

HOR.

———Nor ye who live
In luxury and ease, in pomp and pride,
Think these lost themes unworthy of your ear :
Such themes as these the *rural* Maro sung
To wide imperial *Rome*, in the full height
Of elegance and taste, by *Greece* refin'd.

THOMSON.

E D I N B U R G H :

PRINTED FOR WILLIAM CREECH.

M,DCC,LXXXV.

and J. Johnston And



To
THE INHABITANTS
OF
STIRLINGSHIRE,

The following Poem

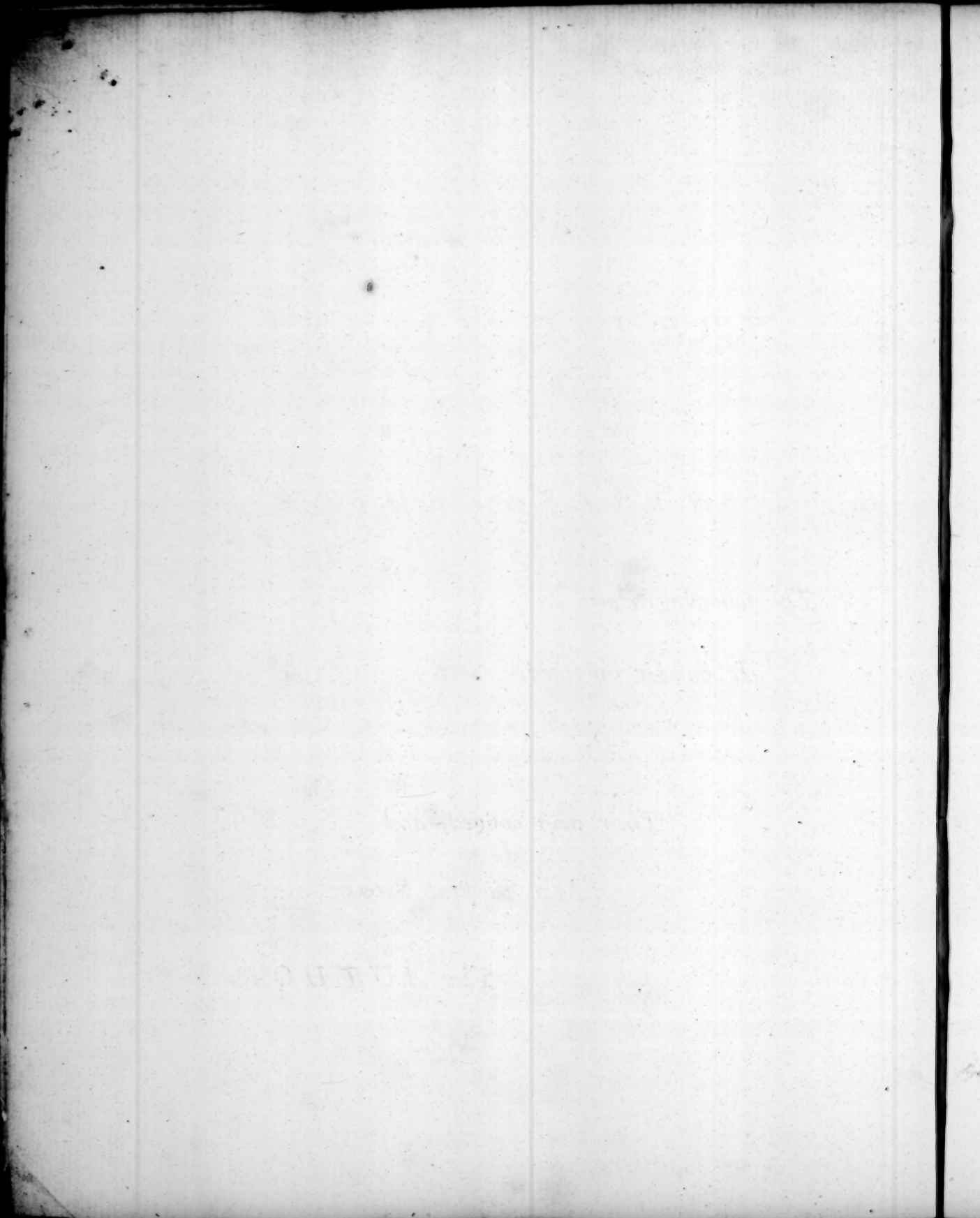
Is humbly inscribed,

By

Their most obliged, and

Most obedient Servant,

The AUTHOR.



TO THE
P U B L I C.

THE CARSE of STIRLING, or, in other words, the view from Stirling Castle, which commands the windings of the Forth, through a rich cultivated plain, has been long and universally admired by every lover of Nature. Other prospects, no doubt, from their being less bounded, and perhaps from a greater diversity of scenery, may constitute a more finished landscape ; but, as a part of a grand whole, as an assemblage of objects uncommon, beautiful, and sublime, and as a picture whose colours strike and dazzle the eye at once, I believe I may venture to say that the Carse of Stirling is unrivalled, if not unequalled, in any part of Great Britain. Nor will this assertion appear too bold, when the following circumstances are attended to.

The CARSE of STIRLING and FALKIRK (both of which are comprehended in the view described) may be said to extend from east to west, in a perfect level of between thirty and forty miles in length, and about five in breadth. A prodigious

gious chain of lofty mountains*, which in some parts present a most sublime and picturesque appearance, completely bound the prospect to the north and north-west. That to the north-east is likewise bounded by another chain of mountains†, which skirt the Carse of Stirling, and shelter it from the most destructive winds. An irregular range of swelling hills terminate the view from the west to the south-east, where the prospect is unbounded, and lost about Edinburgh, the castle and hills of which, though distant thirty-five miles, are sometimes distinguished from Stirling. In the middle of this beautiful bottom, highly cultivated and interspersed with villa, hamlet, wood, and ruin, the Forth winds his serpentine course, from the town of Alloa to Stirling, which, with its spires and castle, towers above the plain, and exhibits a variety of striking appearances, from different parts of the adjacent country. Here the windings of the Forth are most wonderful. To those who have never seen this river, no adequate idea can be given of its enchanting effect, through an extent of plain, either clothed in robes of varied green, enriched with vernal blossoms, or waving with yellow corn. It may not, however, be unnecessary to observe, in support of this remark, that, in the short space of four miles, the forth is said to perform a meandering course of twenty-four; many of which meanders are so fantastical, as to require no small attention to trace their progress. Such are the outlines of an uncommon picture,

* The Grampian hills.

† The Ochil Hills.

picture, which, while it may convey little pleasure to a stranger, others will probably consider superfluous. Something more satisfactory, perhaps, remains to be said, for troubling the public in these times, with a poem which has neither wit, humour, nor pleasantry, to recommend it.

It is many years since the Author first saw and admired the Carse of Stirling. Struck with the beauties of the scene, and calling to mind the state of poetry that once existed in this country, he could not help reflecting on the capricious fate that often accompanies human affairs, and illustrating his observation by the singular fortune of one of the most remarkable spots in Europe. Stirlingshire was long the theatre of bloody and important events, which more than once determined, not only the fate of Kings, but the liberties of a nation. Its fortress, as the key that opened the whole treasures of the North, was the constant prize that animated contending parties, and consequently produced such vicissitudes of fortune, and such exertions of military prowess and civil intrigue. It was, moreover, the favourite residence of our Scottish Monarchs, who, wearied with the broils and tumults of a factious court, used often and anxiously to retire here, where the best part of the year was spent amidst rural sports, and royal pastimes*, near the windings of an enchanting river. These circumstances, added to the striking beauties of surrounding scenery,

* See Nimmo's History of Stirlingshire, pages 250, 251, 252.

scenery, were sufficient, one should suppose, during the reigns of Poetry and Song, to have drawn the Muses to the Carse of Stirling. They, however, continued to absent themselves ; nor is it difficult to assign the cause.

During the period to which we allude, the pastoral life was confined principally, if not entirely, to the southern parts of Scotland. The shepherd tending his flocks and his herds, lost not the beauties of contiguous scenery ; and the happy haunts of love and tranquillity naturally led the poetic mind to celebrate these beauties in song. That this was really the case need not here be insisted on, since almost all our favourite Scots songs and ballads are remarkable for local descriptions. Not a stream could flow, nor a hillock rear its blossomed head, but Poetry felt the influence, and drew the picture ; and, while *Tweed, Yarrow, Leader, &c.* with their pastoral charms, are repeatedly handed down to us in the most passionate strains, the windings of the Forth, and all its uncommon scenery, have remained unsung, or at least too slightly to leave an impression.

These reflections, joined to the pleasure arising from a contemplation of the scene already described, first induced the Poet, young, and impassioned, to sing the praises of the Forth. A variety of circumstances, since that time, drew him to other regions, where, however, ' Nature, and Nature's Charms,'
 did

did not escape him. On his return to Stirlingshire, after several years absence, he still found his favourite scene new and delightful; and, glancing over the pictures of his youthful painting, he observed, or fancied he observed, certain tints, which he conceived might please, and passions which he thought might interest.—He has perhaps deceived himself; but, in whatever light he may appear as a poet, he flatters himself, that, among other motives for publishing ‘The Carse of Stirling,’ the following one will at least screen him from public censure.

A love of pleasure and dissipation has now so completely diffused itself thro’ all ranks, that AGRICULTURE and country improvements seem but secondary concerns with our gentlemen of landed property. Instead of promoting an honest emulation by their bounty and patronage, the labours of an industrious peasantry are considered in no other light than as the means of procuring luxuries to the tables of their pampered landlords. Instead of kindling a spirit of enterprise, by their presence and example, the metropolis of these kingdoms teems with men, who yearly doze away their time, and squander their incomes, amidst a round of follies, which, while they invigorate the mind, bury the importance of a landed gentleman in complete obscurity. To such, the Author of this little piece means not to address himself; but, though he may despair of a change of manners among the dissipated and the un-

C

thinking

thinking part of his countrymen, the picture of rural life he has attempted to draw may not perhaps be unwelcome to those who, uncontaminated by example, point at higher pleasures than the ' Steams of a ball-room, or the squeaking of ' an opera.'

T H E

T H E
C A R S E O F S T I R L I N G *,

A N
E L E G Y.

WRITTEN NEAR THE BANKS OF THE FORTH.

I.

TH Y winding banks, O FORTH ! demand the song ;
Thy plains, where plenty hails returning spring ;
Thy cliffs and mountains, flocks, and rural throng ;
All—all invite th' enraptur'd Muse to sing.

* This title, though unfamiliar to an English ear, the Author has preferred, on account of its having been long affixed to the scene described, and generally known over all Scotland. *Carse* signifies a low flat country, of a rich clayey soil.

II.

And let her sing, when scenes like ~~these~~ conspire
 At once to raise and soothe the mind to rest ;
 Recall the deeds that claim the Patriot's fire,
 And wake each softening virtue of the breast.——

Shine

III.

Far from those haunts where madd'ning Faction reigns,
 And guilty Pomp, and tinsel'd Folly glare ;
 Far from the great, I roam thy peaceful plains,
 And leave to Grandeur all its pride and care.

IV.

Yes, let me court the calm-inspiring morn,
 And catch fresh fragrance, careless where I stray,
 While blossom'd furze, and many a flowering thorn,
 Bloom round, sweet Stream ! thy silver-winding way.

V.

Yes, let me court the broomy-vested glade,
 The dell, where silence reigns profoundly still,
 Save the pure streamlet babbling through the shade,
 Or flocks soft bleating round some neighb'ring hill.

VI.

VI.

Or let me court DUNMIET's * airy height,
Where distant murmurs load the balmy gale,
Where bursts the landscape lengthening on the sight,
And Ceres, bounteous, gladdens all the vale.

VII.

'Tis here, sweet FORTH ! I've trac'd thy margins green,
While grazing herds adorn'd thy winding pride ;
Here, mus'd enrapt on ev'ry cultur'd scene,
With Contemplation smiling by my side.

VIII.

Here, have I listen'd to the rural glee
That round thy meads in laughter wont to fly,
As various pastimes grac'd the hawthorn tree,
When Labour, pausing, stood delighted by.

IX.

Here, too, when Evening, blushing sweetly mild,
With mellow pencil chequers hill and farm,
Oft down the slope, o'erspread with flowerets wild,
I caught each softening sound and sober charm.

D

X.

* One of the Ochil hills that bound the Carse of Stirling to the N. E.

X.

The lowing kine, that wait the wished-for hour,
 Fondly responsive to the milkmaid's call,
 The solemn grandeur of yon ancient tower*,
 Where cooes the stockdove round its mouldering wall;

XI.

The cottage smoke that tops th' encircling wood;
 The thrush melodious on some neighbouring spray;
 The failing vessel winding down the flood;
 The clam'rous joy of childhood's sports and play;

XII.

The shepherd piping home his bleating care,
 That pour their tender plaints around the dale;
 While many a pastoral, many a mournful air
 Chants the fresh damsel at her milking pail.

XIII.

By FORTH's green banks, when Sol, in golden gleam
 On thee, BENLOMOND †! sheds his parting ray;
 When scarce a zephyr curls the glassy stream,
 In many a group the village fair-ones stray.

XIV.

* The remains of the Abbey of Cambuskenneth, founded by David I. of Scotland, in the year 1147.

† The highest of the Grampian mountains, that bound the prospect to the N. W.

XIV.

Sweet smiles the varied prospect as they rove,
Swift springs the salmon to the angler's snare,
Full is the vocal concert of the grove,
And rich the fields that crown the farmer's care.

XV.

Here flowers the pea, in deepening purple clad,
The slender flax in nodding plumes of blue ;
Here blossom'd beans a grateful odour shed,
Waving their dewy heads of varied hue.

XVI.

And here the sweet-brier yields its blushing rose,
Sheltering some floweret coy that shuns the day ;
And willows green to every breeze that blows
Bend o'er the stream, and on its surface play.

XVII.

Near where CAM'SKENNETH's ruin'd glories fall,
And where the garden glows with fruitage crown'd,
The plying barge awaits the frequent call
To waft you o'er to yonder classic ground.

XVIII.

XVIII.

'Twas here, by patriot virtue nobly fired,
Immortal WALLACE rang'd his faithful band,
Contrived new arts *, by Liberty inspired,
And ruin hurl'd on EDWARD's proud command.

XIX.

Yes, dauntless Chief ! though Faction marr'd thy aim,
And Treachery, shameless, crush'd thy houseless head ;
These blood-stain'd fields shall mark thy deathless fame,
And CARRON's murmurs soothe thy injur'd shade.

XX.

* Alluding to the ancient story of Wallace having ordered the main beam of Stirling-bridge, over which Edward I.'s army passed, to be sawed so artfully, that the removal of a pin or wedge caused the downfall of the whole. A man beneath the bridge, in a basket, placed in such a manner as to remain unhurt, executed the design, on a certain signal, which it is said was the blowing of a horn from the Scottish army. See Nimmo's Hist. of Stirlingshire, page 150.

XX.

Hail banks * ! where Slavery fled with haggard look !
 Hail banks ! where SCOTIA caught her wonted pride,
 When BRUCE first conscious heard thy stern rebuke,
 And, blushing, cast Rebellion from his side.

XXI.

Hail Stream ! renown'd in OSSIAN's melting strain,
 Where FINGAL dreadful blazed in patriot ire !
 Where ROME pale trembling mark'd her thousands slain !
 —See ! to their *heap* her vanquish'd sons retire † !

E

XXII.

* The banks of the river Carron, on the opposite sides of which Wallace and Bruce held the memorable conference, after the battle of Falkirk.

† ‘ Raife, ye bards of the song,’ (said Fingal,) ‘ the wars of the streamy
 ‘ Carun. Caracul has fled from my arms, along the fields of his pride. He
 ‘ sets far distant, like a meteor that incloses a spirit of night, when the
 ‘ winds drive it over the heath, and the dark woods are gleaming around.’
 ‘ What does Caros, King of ships ?’ said the son of the now mournful
 Ossian. ‘ Spreads he the wings of his pride, bard of the times of old ?’
 —‘ He spreads them, Oscar,’ replied the bard, ‘ but it is behind his *ga-thered heap* ; he looks over his stones with fear, and beholds thee ter-
 ‘ rible as the ghost of night that rolls the wave to his ships.’ See the *Wav*
of Caros, and the beautiful poem *Comala*.

XXII.

Ah ! where are now thy Patriots fam'd of old,
Neglected SCOTIA ! once thy pride and boast !
Where now thy children faithful, ardent, bold,
Who lov'd thy wilds, and blest thy sea-girt coast !

XXIII.

Lur'd by the sound of Pleasure's baleful strains,
Thy sons, sad Matron ! now ungrateful fly ;
Leave thy uncultur'd fields, and flowery plains
To court a warmer sun and milder sky ;

XXIV.

Yet shall the Bard who pours these fervent lays
Enjoy thy injur'd charms, and slighted clime,
Trace thy wild beauties ardent while he strays
Through all thy haunts romantic and sublime :

XXV.

The oak-clad hill, where towers the rugged steep *,
Adown whose brow the foam-dash'd torrent roars ;
The long-reshounding dale, the distant peep
Of sea and sea-fowl round thy thundering shores ;

XXVI.

* This and the succeeding stanza allude to the wild romantic scenery of the Highlands ; the other is meant as a general description of the pastoral scenery of the south.

XXVI.

The lonely mead with sweetest flowerets drest,
The river murmuring o'er its glittering bed ;
The wood-fring'd lake, on whose unruff'd breast
Some ille fantastic rears its tufted head ;

XXVII.

The varied landscape, mark'd distinct and clear
Of lawn, and mountain, hamlet, stream, and grove,
And golden broom-banks glowing far and near—
The ancient seats of song and pastoral love.

XXVIII.

Come then EUGENIO, leave the pamper'd great,
And to these haunts thy heaven-born virtues bring !
With artless Nature sit in rural state,
And hear the Muse you early taught to sing.

XXIX.

And thou, my LAURA, dear neglected maid !
O come, and yet a long lost wand'rer cheer !
Come, while with thee once more I court the shade,
And all thy joys, and soft complainings hear.—

XXX.

XXX.

Ah ! what avails the yellow blossom'd hill
That bloom'd more sweetly with my smiling fair !
Or what the willow'd bank, or gurgling rill !—
Nor LAURA's voice, nor LAURA's charms are there.

XXXI.

Yet does Remembrance oft with glowing cheek
Paint the soft scenes that crown'd impassion'd youth
When Pity taught the blushing maid to speak
Some melting strain, or some unguarded truth.

XXXII.

Mild was the Eve, and gently wav'd the grove,
Fresh were the flowers that deck'd the green-sward gay,
When down the slope where coo'd the woodland dove
I found my LAURA near the vocal spray.

XXXIII.

Blithe roam'd the fair one round th' encircling wood,
Till by the brook that skirts the hawthorn glade
We came where late a spreading poplar stood,
But now across the stream supinely laid,

XXXIV.

XXXIV.

The tender LAURA starting, heav'd a sigh,
(For by this tree the maid had often fate),
The tear of sorrow fill'd each lovely eye,
' And art thou fallen,' she said, ' that bloom'ft so late !'

XXXV.

' Alas, my EDWIN ! scarce three days are past
' Since I beheld this Poplar gaily grow ;
' Yet see, my friend ! how soon the ruthless blast
' Has laid its strength and towering grandeur low.

XXXVI.

' And what is Man, with all his boasted power !
' Ah ! what tho' youth and roseate beauties bloom !
' E'en thus he falls, when in some luckless hour
' Stern Death untimely shrouds him in the tomb !'

XXXVII.

Cease, lovely Moralift ! I fondly said,
While to my breast I clasp'd the charming fair,
Let love and transport bless this secret shade,
And from thy bosom banish grief and care.

XXXVIII.

Say, why this sad, though sweetly plaintive strain?
 My life! my love! our youth was made for glee;
 Ah! wherefore think of death, or thus complain,
 When EDWIN thinks of nought but love and thee?

XXXIX.

The fair one smil'd, and flush'd with modest charms,
 In whispering accents breath'd this soft return,
 ' Should death untimely snatch thee from my arms,
 ' Ah me! should LAURA have no cause to mourn.'

XL.

Dear, fond *Remembrance*! whither hast thou led
 The vagrant Muse, when CERES claims the strain,
 When ripen'd Harvest waves her golden head,
 Scattering rich plenty o'er yon smiling plain!

XLI.

Welcome POMONA to my ravish'd eye!
 Welcome, ye fields where peace and wealth abound;
 Ye meads where FLORA's fragrant beauties vie;
 Ye trees with fruits in sweet luxuriance crown'd!

XLII.

XLII.

And you, ye Swains, who scorn no cultur'd art,
 But with your labours grace the circling year,
 Welcome, thrice welcome, to a grateful heart !
 To me your labours are forever dear.

XLIII.

And dear to me are all your hours of ease,
 Your days of transport, and your nights of rest ;
 Your smiling feasts, your sports that always please,
 And each fond hope that fills the guiltless breast !

XLIV.

Mark, Grandeur mark ! when all thy borrowed rays
 No more can cheer, or catch the fated eye,
 What simple truths th' untutor'd Muse conveys,
 Nor marvel why thy air-born pleasures fly,

XLV.

Say, is it Pomp that sooths th' industrious mind,
 While yon fair valley glows with ripen'd corn !
 Say, is it Wealth that cheers the labouring hind
 As with the lark he hails th' impurpl'd morn.

XLVI.

Say, is it Title (pageant of the Fair !)
That crowns yon cottag'd housewife's smiling life,
That weaves with tender ties the joys and care
Of mother, husband, mistress, friend, and wife ?

XLVII.

Ah no !—behold the fullen fettle'd gloom
That oft on some proud Courtier's brow appears,
Nor wealth nor name can save his fading bloom,
Nor boasted Grandeur check the secret tears.

XLVIII.

To him no dear connubial joys are known,
No partner guiltless, every pain to share,
No cherub offspring he can call his own,
To smooth with lenient hand his bed of care.

XLIX.

And you, ye Fair, who 'midst the buzzing throng
Can boldly flaunt it each degenerate day,
Say, does a husband's grief, a husband's wrong
No pangs create tho' all the world be gay ?—

L.

But ah ! why should I paint the joyless hours
 That haunt the pleasures of a lawless crew !
 Long since, for rural sports, and peaceful bowers,
 I bade the thoughtless madd'ning crowd adieu.

LI.

For these I left the midnight's tiresome glare,
 The mask, the ball, and fam'd CORNELIA's shrine ;
 Far other joy my rustic mind would share ;—
 Far other transports of the soul are mine !

LII.

The sweets of Friendship join'd with spotless fame,
 The soft'ning charms that from Contentment flow,
 The blush of Love unting'd with guilty shame,
 The heav'n-drawn tear that starts for human woe :

LIII.

These, these, fair VIRTUE ! let the bard enjoy
 Who pants for fame beneath thy sheltering wing ;
 With these, nor care, nor rankling ills annoy,
 And these, O Goddess ! teach the Muse to sing.

G

LIV.

LIV.

O could the Muse mellifluent, as of old,
 Resume the strain, when Nature prompt'd the song,
 When each fond breast its artless sufferings told
 As TWEED and YARROW murmuring roll'd along.

LV.

Then might the Bard obtain no vulgar fame,
 His rural lays be sung through grove and mead;
 Thy children, SCOTIA ! lift his deathless name,
 And FORTH's meanders rival pastoral TWEED !—

LVI.

Yet let him wander blameless by some stream,
 Lost to the crowd, tho' not to peace unknown,
 While strains like these diffuse a frequent gleam,
 And mild Contentment claims him for ~~his~~ own.

h. m.



F I N I S.

